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THE SECRET OF FRIENDSHIP

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BELOVED PERFECTOR:

Friendship is one of the cornerstones of happiness. The individual who has friends possesses a wealth beyond measure. But friendship involves more than having friends; it requires that we be a friend. We live in a generation when stress is placed on "having". Happiness is more a matter of "being". There can be no friendship of a lasting kind unless we are prepared to put ourselves into the personal relationships from which lasting friendships develop.

In certain periods of man's life upon this planet the personal virtues were stressed as the key to life's deepest satisfactions. In the age of chivalry, the knights rode off in different directions, each one bent on missions of valor; they did not need each other. They found their contentment in being alone as they struggled for the right. Now, however, we live in a social age. Whether we like it or not, it is necessary that we learn the secret of human fellowship. In the broader area of international relationships, we have learned that we need friends as the world has shrunk in size. It is equally true of our personal world. We need friends to dispel the loneliness of a life which is surrounded by things mechanical and electronic.

Robinson Crusoe may have existed in comfort before he found his friend Friday, but it was then that life began for him in his exile. Hermit souls may dwell apart in comfort, but only those who live by the side of the road and enjoy human friendships find life worthwhile. Maurice Chevalier, the famous Frenchman, has put this truth into a popular song: "I do not care to be sitting on top of the world if I have to be sitting alone."

We need friends to share our burdens and our joys. Yet often we fail to follow the path that contributes to friendship, and which keeps the ties enduring and meaningful. In this Lesson we will learn some of the secrets of friendship. We will be confronted by our weaknesses, and will be challenged to new devotion to the task of being a friend.

Don't be discouraged if you have faced disappointments in certain of

your friendships. You need to remember that personal relationships often end in failure. If you are honest with yourself it may be that you will discover that your neglect, or your excessive demands, contributed to the breakdown of relationships that once seemed secure and lifelong.

The principles of friendship have been clearly defined in the examples which the ages have left for us to examine. Open your mind to the possibilities of deeper friendships in the days ahead. Life will take on new meaning as you embark upon this adventure.

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PRAYER

Eternal God, we thank Thee for friends. We are grateful for the memory of those whom we have loved and lost a while. Help us to keep firm the ties of friendship that yet remain. Create within us that spirit which will insure us friends who care for us even when we are not worthy. Help us to so love Thee that we may love one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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THE BIBLE AND FRIENDSHIP

The Bible includes many stories of friendship which are helpful to us as we struggle with our personal relationships. The names of Jonothan and David are always linked together as a reminder of friendship at its best. They symbolize the beauty of a friendship between royalty and a commoner where two souls were linked together in deathless devotion. Jonothan was a hero-worshiper of David, who first won renown by an act of bravery. The king's son and the shepherd boy loved each other like brothers. Out of the relationship came the marriage of David to the sister of his young friend. The ties remained unbroken even when Jonothan was slain in battle. There is nothing more beautiful in literature than the lament of David upon the loss of his friend. The influence continued when David adopted the crippled child of his friend and brought him up as his own son.

No friendship among women has ever surpassed that of Ruth and Naomi, a mother-in-law and her son's widow. They were separated by age and tribal custom. Yet who has not been inspired by Ruth's declaration of devotion to the one who was not merely a relative but a beloved friend: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

What do we learn from these ancient stories? It is clear that friendship does not depend upon a similarity of background. It is evident that difference of age is not a barrier. We are reminded that friendship may be immediately at hand, but that it requires concern and sacrifice on our part. We pay a price to be a friend if we are to receive the rewards that friendship brings.

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THE FOREST OF FRIENDSHIP The friends we make during a lifetime may be compared to the trees in a wood. Each of us has his "forest of friendship". Such forests are made up of a variety of trees. Here and there may be found great oaks with roots deep and firm. The oaks slowly mature, developing the ability to withstand times of storm. Then they can serve as a shelter from torrents of rain, or the blistering rays of the summer sun.

It requires years of slow growth for the oaks in our Forest of Friendship to reach their maturity. Then they become the dependable bulwarks to whom we can turn when the heat of turmoil overtakes us, or we are all but blown away by the winds of defeat or hardship. When such an oak falls, under the stroke of death, we are left with a great space in the sky of our little lives, and the gap is not quickly filled.

Many of the trees in our Forest of Friendship bend easily in times of storm. It is unwise to attempt to use them for shelter when the winds of life blow hard and strong. But they do have certain values, and they add beauty to the passing days. The attractive but fragile human friendships increase the pleasure of daily living, but they are often of little value in the times of serious testing.

In your Forest of Friendship cultivate the trees that match beauty with strength. Seek out the friends who are tall spruces, whose spires point to the sky and to God. Hold fast to the maples whose inner spirit flows out to bring life and encouragement to others. Give thanks to God for each passing year that brings new beauty and strength through the good friends in your Forest of Friendship.

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THE ART OF FRIENDSHIP A careful study of the art of friendship should be one of your most eager quests. One of the inner motives that moves men to strive for fame is the desire that they may continue to be remembered in love and devotion after the struggles of life are over.

Maeterlinck, in "The Blue Bird", pictures the dead as existing so long as they are remembered; after that comes the eternal night. It is a pagan concept, but we can learn something from it.

The best casual mixers in our society are the politicians whose elective positions depend upon their popularity with the voters. Many are sincere. They merit the achievement of their ambition. However, unless one has a genuine interest in his fellow man, the public will be quick to detect the false from the true, and will eventually retire to private life those who seek to win support with a hollow and shallow type of friendship.

William Jennings Bryan was twice defeated as a candidate for the presidency of the United States. He often espoused unpopular causes. He was frequently made the object of ridicule by his enemies. But Mr. Bryan was a man who made enduring friendships. A historian has said that "more people thought of Mr. Bryan as a personal friend than any other figure in American history." He had a genius for friendship, not the friendship that drains strength, or asks a reward for loyalty, but which gives and serves.

Experience teaches us that it is wise to avoid friendships that depend upon our success or social position. Many people stand ready to shout our praises when all is well with us. The individual who has honors to bestow, money to distribute, or a legacy to leave, is often in doubt about friendships which are cultivated out of expediency. A public official who is in a position to reward others is unwise to boast about the number of his friends. There are few sadder figures than that of a person who had camp followers at the heyday of his glory, but is all but forsaken in his hours of loneliness. In the city of Washington one encounters more than a few who have had this experience. Henry Clay properly called Washington a city of broken hearts. Many people will agree with him.

This does not mean that we should be suspicious of offered friendship. Life can be a misery if we constantly question the motives of those who reach out to us. But it does mean that we will turn with greater confidence to those friends with whom we have shared both hardships and joys. They will stand by us through all of life's changing experiences.

This kind of friendship requires that you, also, be a constant friend - loyal in sunshine and in shadow. You will receive love and devotion in proportion to how you pour out your love and devotion. If you sow the seeds of friendliness and good will, the fruits of friendliness and good will will be your harvest. Sow distrust and hate and they, in turn, will yield their harvest of suspicion.

It is to your friends that you first turn when the shadows fall. But you should not run to them in a demanding spirit. Many centuries ago Cicero pronounced the death knell upon friendships that are cultivated for the purpose of what they offer in return. No man or woman is more pitiful than he who develops friendships with an eye upon the reward he can expect. There is something abhorrent about one who does kindnesses in the name of friendship, while planning to render a bill in kind at a later date.

There are some of the cynical type who agree with the words written by Oliver Goldsmith:

"What is friendship but a name
A claim that lulls to sleep;
A shade that follows wealth and fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep."

But the number of cynics is limited. The finest friendships exist among people who have the same ideals, or those who are engaged in rendering a similar service, or those who share common interests. From such mutual concerns there develops first an awareness of a natural bond, then later a friendship that becomes priceless.

Hold fast to the friendships built up through the passing years. It is argued by some thinkers that no great friendships are ever made after a person is forty years of age, for the simple reason that after that time few will pay the price of a great friendship. However, it is true that many seasons of consistent concern are needed to mature real friendships. When they are neglected, like a flower garden, they wither and die. Therefore, go slowly in driving from your mind and heart one whom you have known as a friend. It was Sophocles who said, "He who plucks a friend from out his heart hath lost a treasured thing as dear as his own heart."

Though the world's great friendships have always been marked by many years of shared experiences, you should remember that it is never too late to make new friends. The quality may be different, but the fellowship can be close and real.

Every normal heart hungers for friendship. We never grow too old to long for someone who understands our heartaches and our joys. While it is true that people past middle age often have more friends in the next world than this one, it is also true that advancing years bring a sense of kinship with many of our fellows whom earlier we would never have noticed. In this common experience of maturity you may find ties that bind you to others in enduring friendship.

All of us are in debt to our friends. Everyone who succeeds may well explain his success by saying with Charles Kingsley, "I had a friend." In those rare moments when you are tempted to grow cynical because of the neglect, or the unfaithfulness, of someone whom you knew as a friend, remember the Master of all men who, out of twelve chosen friends, had one doubt him, one deny him, and one betray him. Yet those same twelve carried his message throughout the world. The compensations of friendship so far outweigh the disappointments and heartbreaks that you are wise to launch out eagerly on the adventure of making friends.

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THE QUALITIES OF FRIENDSHIP Sincerity is basic to enduring friendship. Emerson defined a friend as one with whom we can be sincere. No one will allow the doorway of his heart to swing open long to one he mistrusts. The fawning flatterer is never at heart admired, nor is he the object of real devotion.

One must be both dependable and trustworthy to win and hold friends. We cannot claim lasting friendships if we constantly take inventories to learn the value of these investments. Like the stars, which hold a fixed position in the universe and never change, real friendships are constant. We relish the quiet days when happiness is shared and brings us contentment, but we respond eagerly to the need of a friend when storm clouds gather about him, or a deluge engulfs his life.

It is important, also, that you be agreeable if you want to cultivate friendship. Avoid the critical, fault-finding attitude. Usually those who are most critical of others are themselves far from perfection. Criticism, like charity, should begin at home. Robert E. Lee was one of the princely gentlemen of our nation's history. On a certain occasion he heard two friends criticizing a man whom all three counted as a friend. Lee was true to his opinion of the one under fire, and replied, "I am so busy trying to correct the faults of Robert E. Lee that I have no time to find fault with the acts of my friend."

There is another side to this matter, however. Friendship which is deep and genuine should lead us to welcome the words of counsel which may come from the one we claim as friend. Acquaintances are embittered by the quick criticism concerning modes of behavior or thought. But friendship has a foundation of understanding and love. If it is genuine we will welcome the correction or criticism of the one in whom we have confidence.

A kindly, helpful nature is another quality that contributes to friendship. Look into your own experience and you will discover that many friendships

were made when you helped someone in an hour of despair, or when that person helped you. It is a certain fact that the kindly spirit attracts, and the unsympathetic spirit repels. Not all of those to whom you are kind will become your friends, but the kindly nature lays the foundation out of which friendship may develop.

Friendship thrives on encouragement. It is your privilege to lift the morale of the one you claim as friend by praising him for his efforts. Many friendships originate in the moment when a word is spoken to give encouragement to one who is striving against difficult odds. A college president declared that it required weeks for him to recover his personal confidence and enthusiasm after a visit to his home town because cold water was thrown upon him and his work, by a friend who should have encouraged him.

On the other hand, most of the close friends of President Eisenhower during his term of office were men with whom he had previously had only a casual acquaintance, but men who led him to believe he could best serve his country in public office. The encouragement became a doorway to friendship.

Life at best is a struggle, without slowing up or stopping the water that turns the wheels of high endeavor. Tennyson was correct in saying that we are a part of all whom we have met, and the product of the belief and trust of our friends.

It is well to try to understand the hopes and aspirations of all those whom you meet. They will be enlarged by your love and devotion, and your attitude may lead to the most valued friendship that has ever enriched your life.

Closely related to this idea but not identical with it is the truth that friendship often stems from a brotherly spirit. Most noonday clubs for men stress the spirit of brotherhood. It is not difficult to understand that countless deep and abiding friendships have originated in that atmosphere. We are drawn to those who know us well enough to address us by our first names. Sharing in a club or group in which that custom prevails often promotes the atmosphere in which friendship flourishes.

It is important to consider that ridicule and sarcasm are secret weapons that destroy many friendships. Carlyle called sarcasm the language of the devil. You should shun this evidence of your inferiority as you would a plague if you want to hold your friends, or make new friends. You will lose every possibility of the relationship out of which friendship springs if you resort to cutting words that undermine confidence, and if you ridicule worthy effort.

You will be aware that friendship sometimes seems to develop unexpectedly and in unlikely places. Perhaps you attend a meeting at which you meet someone to whom you are immediately attracted. You arrange for further contacts and these lead to friendship. It was your attitude and your out-reach that made this possible. Do not lose sight of the fact that the qualities you exhibit either encourage or hinder the development of friendship. In large measure the person you are will determine the number and the depth of your friendships.

THE TRAGEDY OF
BROKEN FRIENDSHIPS

It remains for us to consider the tragedy of broken friendships and the methods we can use to avoid this all too frequent occurrence. Few experiences are more damaging to the personality than the separations and tensions that destroy a long standing friendship. An event in American history illustrates both the tragedy and the correction.

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were friends in the Continental Congress. The one was the voice and the other was the pen of the revolution which gave birth to the Declaration of Independence. When peace came, Adams went to England, and Jefferson to France as our Ambassadors. They were close friends and associates. When Washington was elected president he brought Jefferson home to become Secretary of State. Disagreement over the Constitution brought first a rift in their friendship, then enmity. Jefferson served as vice-president under Adams, then defeated him for high office in a bitter campaign. For many years they did not speak to each other. It was a tragedy of a broken friendship that brought hardship for the country they both loved.

But this was not the end. Jefferson's motherless little girl was befriended by Mrs. Adams. This was followed by sorrow in the death of loved ones. Both sent letters of sympathy. Out of their common sorrow came understanding and the renewal of the intimate friendship which lasted for thirty years. On his deathbed Adams cried out faintly, "The country is safe! Thomas Jefferson still lives."

Life is too short to allow the bonds of friendship to be shattered by a misunderstanding. If your friend had qualities that led you to feel affection and admiration, it is probable that the qualities are still present. The source of the tension between you may have been temporary illness, or worry, or lack of communication. For the sake of your friend you ought to take steps to heal the breach. But no less for your own sake. To lose a genuine friend is to take something from your personality that you can ill afford to lose. You may even find that your own attitude was the cause of the breach. Failure to heal that wound might leave a residue of guilt that could mar all your future life.

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DIVINE
FRIENDSHIP

Human friendships are made more enduring and meaningful when we learn the secrets of Divine friendship. The heart of faith is the acceptance of the gift of friendship with the Master of Men. When Jesus lived in Galilee his friendship was offered to all who would accept it. Men who worked with their hands, women who were burdened, little children who were eager - all these felt the outreach of his love, and came into the circle of his friendship.

You may ask the question: How can I claim the friendship today? Let us think how a little child accepts the friendship of Jesus. When she kneels to say her evening prayer she feels that someone is there, tall and dark, in a white robe, with a very kind face, and perhaps a hand stretched out to her head. She takes hold of the gift of his friendship by the use of her imagination.

You can know a similar experience. You return home from a busy and trying day. You are tired and disappointed and disillusioned. You feel an impulse to write a letter to crush those who have wronged you. Then, as you relaxed, you felt a longing for a friend who would give a feeling of calm and comfort. You may not have a vision, but you feel the presence of the Divine Friend. The tension

relaxes. You sense a love and concern that quiets your anxious heart.

God gives us this gift for which we need not strive, and about which we need not argue. Our attitude is that of acceptance of something real, which God has offered to His children. Consider a picture that may make the experience real:

Suppose a stranger offers you a thousand dollars. You do not turn your back on the man. You do not say, "I'm sorry. I cannot accept the gift until I find an intellectual basis for it." You put it in the bank, and draw checks upon the deposit. The central gift of the faith you possess is a gift you cannot see, but upon which you draw, day by day.

The gift of friendship is priceless. It provides an endless treasure of comfort and strength. To experience its reality is to discover the basis for life at its best. It will enrich your human friendships. It will contribute to your understanding and sympathies.

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CONCLUSION

When you count the treasures that give your life meaning you will place your friendships high on the list. Without friends you would be desolate when the world presses upon you. So study the qualities that make for true friendship.

Cultivate friendships by being a true friend yourself. Although it will require time and effort to do this, you will learn that no energies you expend upon personality development will bring more rich and lasting rewards.

FRIENDSHIP IS ONE OF THE GOLDEN KEYS TO HAPPINESS.

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AFFIRMATION

With God's help I will take time to count the blessings of friendship; I will endeavor to cultivate those qualities that will make others want me for a friend.

Blessings,

Your Instructor.